

NOT TESTIFYING



Betsy Gara  
Executive Director  
Connecticut Council of Small Towns  
Before the  
Government Administration & Elections Committee  
February 6, 2015

**RE: SB-847, AN ACT CREATING A CODE OF ETHICS FOR MUNICIPAL  
OFFICIALS AND EMPLOYEES.**

The first selectmen and mayors in our small towns understand the importance of maintaining high ethical standards. They work tirelessly – nights, weekends, and holidays - on behalf of the communities they serve and with the community's best interests at heart.

The individuals in our communities who are appointed or elected to various municipal boards and commissions are also to be commended for volunteering countless hours to serving the public. And, our communities rely on the professionalism and expertise of municipal employees who perform a wide range of critical functions. As we deliberate this bill, it is important to note that, with little exception, these volunteers, officials and employees deserve our appreciation.

Although we recognize that this proposal is well-intentioned, the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) is concerned that SB-847, which authorizes the Office of State Ethics to enforce a code of ethics for municipal officials and employees, is seriously flawed.

The vast majority of Connecticut's municipalities have voluntarily adopted a municipal code of ethics to prohibit activities that may be interpreted as an attempt to influence municipal decisions or actions. These ordinances have been drafted and adopted with the involvement and input of the community, at considerable expense to the town.

SB-847 would require towns to abandon these efforts and, instead, be subject to a state code of ethics. This sends a negative signal to towns that have gone through the time and expense of adopting a local code of ethics that their efforts have been a waste of time.

Moreover, the state is facing continued economic challenges and, according to OPM, is in a state of "permanent fiscal crisis". Expanding the jurisdiction of the Office of State Ethics to cover municipalities – most of whom have already adopted a code of ethics – does not seem to be the best use of the state's limited resources. Unfortunately, when state agencies lack sufficient staff and funding to enforce a particular law or policy, what



tends to happen is that they shift enforcement to the municipalities and/or require municipalities to complete voluminous reports to demonstrate compliance.

Although the bill itself does not require reporting or recordkeeping, municipalities will have to maintain records and possibly require officials and employees to complete reports to ensure compliance. This will impose additional costs and burdens on towns and cities at a time when local budgets are already strained.

COST is also concerned that imposing a state prescribed code of ethics on municipal boards and commissions may discourage citizens from agreeing to serve in this capacity. It is increasingly difficult to find people to volunteer to serve on local boards and commissions because of the time involved. Certainly, the prospect of being faced with an ethics complaint that may be adjudicated in court due to some inadvertent or imagined violation will exacerbate this problem.

COST urges rejection of this bill and, instead, recommends that the committee pursue efforts to continue to encourage and assist towns in adopting a municipal code of ethics.